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TAGS: PREL ECON ETRD ENRG XF EG KU QA SA AE JA

SUBJECT: PREVIEW OF PRIME MINISTER ABE'S TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST

REF: TOKYO 1058

Classified By: Ambassador J. T. Schieffer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Immediately following his summit with President Bush, Japanese PM Abe will visit Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Kuwait, Qatar, and Egypt between April 28 and May 2. A major goal of the trip will be to enhance economic relations and to raise Japan's profile in the region. Abe will be accompanied by a business delegation numbering over 170 participants that will be led by Keidanren Chairman (and Canon CEO) Fujio Mitarai and include between 60 to 70 Chief Executive Officers. From a political perspective, Abe hopes to elevate relations with many of the states of the region, demonstrate Japan's commitment to the Middle East, and gain support for issues of importance to Tokyo, such as permanent U.N. Security Council membership and maintaining pressure on North Korea. In Kuwait, Abe will visit Ali Al Salem Air Base to meet Japan's Air Self Defense Force (ASDF) personnel supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom, and in Abu Dhabi he plans to meet with members of the Maritime Self Defense Forces (MSDF) deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Diplomats based in Tokyo from the countries to be visited are excited about the trip and hopeful that ties will be

enhanced. END SUMMARY.

NOT JUST OIL: SEEKING A "MORE DIVERSE" RELATIONSHIP

¶12. (C) Following Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's meetings with President Bush in Washington, he will fly directly to Saudi Arabia arriving April 28 to kick off a five-day swing through the Middle East, during which he will make additional stops in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Egypt, according to MOFA Second Middle East Division Principal Deputy Director Motosada Matano. MOFA Director General for Middle Eastern and African Affairs Norihiro Okuda told Deputy Chief of Mission a major goal of the trip is to take Japan's relations with these countries "beyond oil" and to develop a more diverse "multilayered" economic relationship and lay the framework for a deeper political dialogue. In addition to bilateral relations, Abe also will wish to discuss regional issues with Arab leaders including Iraq, Iran, and the Middle East Peace Process.

¶13. (C) Abe's visit comes two months after Foreign Minister Aso's "Middle East Policy As I See It" speech set forth Japan's interests in the region (reftel). First and foremost on Aso's list of interests is the fact that Japan imports more than 90 percent of its crude oil from the Middle East. Second is the opportunity for Japanese businesses to participate in and profit from commercial ventures in the economically sound countries of the region. And third, harkening back to the dependence on oil, is Japan's desire to

see stability throughout the region. One action that Aso specified Japan would take was to increase the number of high-level visits. Abe's trip follows recent separate visits to Japan by the Iraqi Prime Minister, Vice President. In addition, Tokyo hosted an Iraqi parliamentary delegation to attend a Japanese-sponsored reconciliation seminar, and also just hosted an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian gathering to promote confidence building measures and Japan's "Corridor of Peace and Prosperity" initiative, which is aimed at advancing the Peace Process. Japan has also been in the process of negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council.

¶14. (C) Highlighting the seriousness with which the Japanese are taking this visit is the high-powered caliber of the trade delegation that will accompany the Prime Minister. According to Okuda and Matano, at least 170 private business executives will make the trip, including between 60 to 70 CEOs. The business delegation will be led by the Canon CEO Fujio Mitarai, Chairman of the Keidanren, Japan's most influential business federation. Senior government officials who will accompany the Prime Minister include National Security Advisor Yoriko Koike, Special Assistant for Public Affairs Hiroshige Seko, and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura. Mrs. Abe will also accompany the Prime Minister and separate programs for her are being planned at all stops. Ranking MOFA officials will include Okuda and Japan's Ambassador in Charge of Reconstruction Assistance to Iraq and Afghanistan Gotaro Ogawa.

¶15. (C) Another goal of the visit, Matano told Embassy Tokyo, is to focus Japanese public opinion on the "bright side" of developments in the Middle East. When most Japanese think of the region, he said, they see it as a dangerous, negative place. The Abe Administration wants to highlight to the public that there are positive developments taking place, and that there are opportunities for Japan to make a difference, both politically and economically.

LINK TO WASHINGTON VISIT: GLOBAL PARTNER JAPAN

¶16. (C) According to both Okuda and Matano, PM Abe's visit to the Middle East immediately after meeting with the President is not an accident. The Japanese wish to link the visits and

hope to advance the concept, initiated by former Prime Minister Koizumi, that the U.S.-Japan alliance is global in nature and not merely regional in scope. While Abe does not want to be seen as simply a "messenger" delivering the mail from Washington, the Japanese do want to be seen to be working in concert with the United States toward common goals on Middle East issues while, at the same time, maintaining their own independent policy. Hence, Abe will be looking forward to discussing the region with the President and then

following up in meetings with key Arab leaders by pressing interests mutually shared between Japan and the U.S. Matano cautioned, however, that Abe will most likely not be focusing on issues such as democratization or human rights in his meetings with Arab leaders. One of his major themes throughout the visit will be how Japan can help with the promotion of education and vocational training.

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¶7. (C) Each stop along the way, except for Cairo, will involve a morning arrival, afternoon and evening programs to include lunches and dinners, an overnight stay, and an early morning departure. Egypt is the only country where Abe will not spend the night. The initial outlines for each stop are as follows:

Saudi Arabia

¶8. (C) PM Abe will arrive the morning of April 28 and depart on April 29. The major goal of the visit will be to enhance economic relations. The King will be hosting the visit, Saudi Ambassador to Tokyo Faisal Trad told an Embassy Tokyo political officer, and is very much looking forward to the first visit by a Japanese Prime Minister since 2003.

United Arab Emirates

¶9. (C) PM Abe will arrive the morning of April 29 and depart on April 30. A major objective is to ask for support in extending concessions for Japanese drilling rights set to expire in 2012. In Abu Dhabi, Abe will pay a visit to a MSDF ship deployed with Coalition Forces in the Indian Ocean as part of Operation Enduring Freedom that will be making a port call. The Prime Minister plans to visit Dubai for three to four hours where the focus will be on developing commercial and business relations. Prime Minister Muhammad will host a luncheon for both the political and business delegations.

Kuwait

¶10. (C) PM Abe will arrive the morning of April 30 and depart on May 1. There will be a business seminar and meetings with the Emir and Prime Minister, followed by a dinner. Abe will be driven out to Ali Al Salem Air Base to visit ASDF forces deployed there as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Kuwaiti Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Khaled Al-Mutairi told Embassy Tokyo that this will be the first visit ever to Kuwait by a Japanese Prime Minister.

Qatar

¶11. (C) Arrival is scheduled for the morning of May 1 with a May 2 departure. As with the other stops, there will be business events and political meetings. Abe plans to give an interview to Al-Jazeera but, according to Matano, it has still not been determined whether it will be live or taped.

Egypt

¶12. (C) Cairo is the only stop where Abe will not be staying

overnight. The planned arrival time is 0900 on May 2 with a 2200 departure the same day. Egyptian Embassy First Secretary Walid Haggag told Embassy Tokyo political officer

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that Egypt recognizes it is an "add on," observing that the obvious aim of the visit to the region is to make business connections with the rich oil exporting countries of the Gulf. However, he noted, "it is impossible to come to the Middle East without stopping in Cairo." He said nothing major is expected to come out of the visit, but then described a detailed draft joint statement proposed by the Japanese side. Both sides hope to expand upon the "Japan-Egypt Partnership Program" initiated in 1999 and set up a "Joint Strategic Dialogue" relationship between Ministries of Foreign Affairs at either the Ministerial or Deputy Minister level. Japanese ODA programs with Egypt will be discussed, and the Japanese hope to get an Egyptian endorsement for their "Corridor of Peace and Prosperity" initiative with the Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians. Abe will invite President Mubarak to visit Tokyo in conjunction with the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TCAD IV) in 2008.

¶13. (C) Other topics to be discussed in Cairo, according to Haggag, include the upcoming "Japan-Arab Dialogue Forum" between Japan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia scheduled for November in Alexandria, and an expanded "Japan-Arab Conference" which Haggag described as being like Davos but for Arabs and Japan only. On other topics, the Joint Statement will support reconciliation in Iraq, call on Iran to comply with UNSCRs 1737 and 1747 and to cease nuclear enrichment activities, urge continued support to Lebanon and the government of Prime Minister Siniora, and endorse a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East and Israeli accession to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Japan has included language on North Korea and the abductee issue, and will also call on Egypt to support its bid for a permanent seat on the Security Council and, in the meantime, for support in obtaining a rotating seat in 2009. Haggag said that although Egypt will most likely vote to return Japan to the Security Council in 2009, it is too early for Cairo to publicly commit to this now.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Prime Minister Abe's visit to the Middle East is an ambitious undertaking, not only in terms of the number of countries to be covered in a short period, but also in terms of the size and makeup of his delegation which, according to Matano, will require at least three aircraft to transport - two government planes and a chartered 747. Matano said he is frantically scrambling to find 150 Japanese diplomats who can fill TDY slots to support the visit. We believe Abe's trip is another signal that Japan intends to play an increasingly visible role in the Middle East as is strives to assure a continued flow of oil and improved economic and commercial relations with the Gulf states.

SCHIEFFER